EARLY ANGLO-SAXON SHIELDS

By Tania Dickinson, F.S.A. and Heinrich Härke

BEING VOLUME 110 OF ARCHAEOLOGIA
THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF LONDON
1992

THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF LONDON
BURLINGTON HOUSE, PICCADILLY, LONDON W1V 0HS

FRONT COVER: *Detail of the Franks Casket*
Photograph: courtesy of the Trustees of the British Musuem

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

© The Society of Antiquaries of London, 1992
ISBN 0-85431-260-9
ISSN 0261-3409

C 20427 70

CONTENTS

List of illustrations vi
List of tables vii
Preface ix

I: INTRODUCTION 1

II: TYPOLOGY OF METAL SHIELD FITTINGS 4

Shield bosses *by* Tania M. Dickinson 4
Shield grips *by* Heinrich Härke 24
Other fittings *by* Heinrich Härke 27

III: SHIELD TECHNOLOGY *by* Heinrich Härke 31

The boss 31
Grip and handle 35
The board 43

IV: THE USE OF THE SHIELD: COMBAT AND DISPLAY *by* Heinrich Härke 55

The shield in combat 55
Display and symbolism 61

V: THE SHIELD IN THE BURIAL RITE *by* Heinrich Härke 63

Frequency and chronology of shield burials 63
The deposition of the shield 63
The shield in weapon combinations 67
Correlations of shield burial: wealth and age 68
Regional variations of the shield burial custom 69

VI: CONCLUSIONS 71

Appendix 1: Sites used in the computer analysis of shield bosses from the Upper Thames region *by* Tania M. Dickinson 73
Appendix 2: Type list of shield bosses from the Upper Thames region used in the computer analysis *by* Tania M. Dickinson 74
Appendix 3: Cemeteries with shield burials in the national sample *by* Heinrich Härke 75
Appendix 4: Shield board fittings (other than studs) in the national sample, with additions *by* Heinrich Härke 77
Appendix 5: Technical data of shield components from selected cemeteries *by* Heinrich Härke 79
Appendix 6: Notes on the shield reconstruction *by* Heinrich Härke 83

Summary, Résumé, Zusammenfassung 84
Bibliography 85
Sources 90
Index 91

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Location of sites in the national sample 2
2. Location of sites used in the computer analysis of shield bosses from the Upper Thames region 3
3. Attributes used in analysis of shield bosses 5
4. Scatter diagram of shield boss clusters produced by Single Linkage at 90 per cent similarity level 7
5. Scatter diagram of shield boss clusters produced by Average Linkage at 60 per cent similarity level 8
6. Scatter diagram of shield boss clusters produced by Average Linkage at 65 per cent similarity level and resulting classification groups 9
7. Group 1.1 shield bosses 11
8. Group 1.2 shield bosses 12
9. Group 2 shield bosses 13
10. Group 3 shield bosses 14
11. Part of a long shield grip (type IIIa) from Wheatley 17
12. Group 4 shield bosses 18
13. Group 5 shield bosses 20
14. Groups 6–7 shield bosses 21
15. Group 8 shield bosses 22
16. Schematic summary of typological and chronological sequence of shield boss groups in Early Anglo-Saxon England 23
17. Types of iron shield grips 25
18. Types of metal board fittings 28
19. The 'tall straight cone' (Group 7) from Portsdown I, grave 6 showing the seam 32
20. Possible methods of shield-boss construction 33
21. Inside view of Group 3 boss from Abingdon I, grave B69 34
22. Inside view of Group 1.1 boss from Abingdon I, grave B48 34
23. Iron grip from Pewsey grave 68 with remains of leather strip binding 36
24. Complex handle constructions 37
25. Wood remains of a type A1 handle construction (lap joint) on the grip from Winterbourne Gunner grave IV 38
26. Short flat grip (type Ia1) from Pewsey grave 47 with a D2 handle construction 38
27. Finds of shield components and fittings from the Thorsbjerg bog deposit 39
28. Wooden handle from the Nydam bog deposit 38
29. Section through the centre of a shield with a lap-joint handle 41
30. Boss (Group 3) and grip (type Ib) from Orpington grave 37 42
31. Shield on the Repton stone 43
32. Shields on the Franks Casket 44
33. Anglo-Saxon shield on the Bayeux Tapestry 45
34. Minimum and maximum diameters of shield boards in the national sample 47
35. Thickness of shield boards in the national sample 48
36. Warriors with shields showing board rivets, on two helmet plates from grave XIV at Vendel 56
37. Group 2 boss from Abingdon grave B39 with damage to the wall and selective corrosion at the point of stress 57
38. Group 1.1 boss from Pewsey grave 47 with a puncture of the flange 57
39. Group 1.1 boss from Pewsey grave 22 with apex repair 58
40. Flange of Group 1.2 boss from Berinsfield grave 69 with an iron strip riveted against the underside 58
41. X-ray of boss from Berinsfield grave 69 59
42. Group 1.1 boss from Winterbourne Gunner grave I with a second set of empty rivet holes 59

43. Grip from Pewsey grave 94 with remains of ?carrying strap 60
44. Chronology of the Anglo-Saxon shield burial rite 64
45. Positions of shield bosses in 245 Anglo-Saxon burials 65
46. David Brown with his shield replica 71
47. Reconstruction of an Early Anglo-Saxon shield 72

LIST OF TABLES

1. Coding system for multivariate analysis of Upper Thames region shield bosses 6
2. Regional distribution of 251 classifiable shield bosses in the national sample (including unstratified bosses) 10
3. Comparison of boss-type frequencies in the Upper Thames region and the national sample 10
4. Frequencies of shield grip types in the national sample 26
5. Associations of shield grip types and shield boss groups in the national sample 26
6. Regional distribution of 174 classifiable shield grips 26
7. Associations of shield board fittings and shield boss groups 29
8. Regional distribution of shield board fittings 30
9. Frequencies of boss apex types 34
10. Weight of boss types 34
11. Published wood identifications from shield components 40
12. Probable diameters of shield boards (including published cases outside the sample) 46
13. Shield board wood in the national sample 48
14. Density and strength of timbers used for shields 49
15. Examples of long shield board rivets 53
16. Frequencies and locations of damage and repairs on 102 shield bosses from 18 burial sites 57
17. Positions of shields in Anglo-Saxon graves 66
18. The shield in weapon combinations (undisturbed burials only) 67
19. Shield frequencies by age groups 68
20. Regional variations in shield frequencies 70